

Thursday 27th September 2007
Stockholm Concert Hall

Symphony Concert

The Royal Stockholm Philharmonic Orchestra

Alan Gilbert, conductor

Richard Strauss: Suite from Der Rosenkavalier (the Cavalier of the Rose)

INTERVAL

Richard Wagner: Prelude and Isolde's Love-Death from "Tristan and Isolde"

Alexander Scriabin: Le Poème de l'extase

Richard Strauss (1864–1949): Suite from Der Rosenkavalier (the Cavalier of the Rose)

After Elektra's premiere 1909 there were few who believed that two years later Richard Strauss would write an opera containing a waltz, which, furthermore, would become popular. Elektra was Strauss' first collaboration with the librettist Hugo Von Hofmannsthal. Over the years this extremely intelligent and well worked-out libretto lifted Strauss and the art of opera to new heights.

If Elektra busied itself with the Greek tragedy's – and mankind's – ancient problem in the whirlpool of power, sex, blood and death, in Der Rosenkavalier misters Strauss and Von Hofmannsthal turned to a diametrically opposite epoch – Rococo. Perhaps the most artificial of times, unceasingly fixed on the surface, but naturally Strauss/Hofmannsthal understood that beneath this surface were the remains of man's Greek past. The excitement between urges and the need for keeping up appearances gave us an almost perfect basis for an opera.

The symbol for the surface (NB not superficiality) came to be the waltz. An anachronistic and brilliant

waltz by Strauss. The waltz music is in the orchestra movement; while Hofmannsthal's psychologically virtuous dialogue is above. The premiere in 1911 was an immediate success and it became one of the most loved of Strauss' operas.

Richard Strauss' life spans from the time for Bismarck's unification of Germany up to the occupying powers' creation of two German states in 1949. During the Second World War the ageing Strauss experienced how the cultural values were bombed to pieces. He saw how the regime whose Reich's Chamber of Music chairman he had been, contributed to the devastation of Germany. So perhaps it is not so strange that in 1944 Strauss turned back to the Cavalier of the Rose, and compiled an orchestra suite from the opera.

As Octavian said in the final terzetto of the Cavalier of the Rose; "Everything is passing before me as a dream" ■

Richard Wagner (1813–83): Prelude and Isolde's Love-Death from "Tristan and Isolde"

Dissonance is a sound which although is nagging and unstable is also a beautiful longing for the even harmony of the consonance. That this nagging and unstable sound longing for resolution should become a musical metaphor for erotic love is obvious afterwards. But when Richard Wagner wrote his opera Tristan and Isolde between 1857 and 1859 this was a world of sounds that was greatly unexplored. Wagner wrote Tristan and Isolde during a break in his work on Ring of the Nibelung, but because of this advanced harmonic experimentation Tristan still has a wholly unique world

of sounds. For contemporary listeners, Tristan is a classic, but the prelude's introductory chords were shaken up: two unresolved dissonances after each other! It was of such great importance that these tones were given their own name – Tristan chords, used and quoted by many composers. And after this sound, the music world was never the same again. Music had started to liberate itself from what until then had been the ruling harmony. But not only that – the obviously erotic charge in Wagner's opera was something completely new. There are long, half-hour long, musical slurs.



Mark Twain, who visited Wagner's own opera house in Bayreuth, experienced a performance of *Tristan and Isolde*: "I know of some, and have heard of many, who could not sleep after it, but cried the night away. I feel strongly out of place here. Sometimes I feel like the one sane person in the community of the mad."

But the production is much more than an erotic depiction. Wagner was strongly influenced by Schopenhauer's philosophy and his conception of the world as will and idea. This leads to a final scene where both lovers are united – although in death, this highest lust! – and the nagging and unstable get their resolution. ■

Aleksandr Skrjabin (1872–1915): *Le Poème de l'extase* op 54 (1908)

Can poor philosophy lead to a musical revolution? The fact is that that is the case. Aleksandr Skrjabin was in his introductory phases an extremely sensitive piano composer following Chopin and Liszt, a creator of atmosphere of grand proportions but small scale. He read German thinkers such as Nietzsche and Fichte, as well as poetry in the form of the Russian Symbolists, but it was when he decided on theosophy, especially the great theosophist Madame Blavatsky, when the revolution took place. He left the tonalities and embarked on a free harmonic universe, ignited by abstruse ideas about cosmic battles and the coming liberation of mankind. He was a creator and also a deliverer. Of course he had already composed for two orchestras. Two not too impressive symphonies in the great style he had written before the breaking point came with the third, "*le divin poème*" (1904). The fourth should follow, but instead of a production with se-

veral movements it had only one movement – his regularly played piece for orchestras, "*Poème de l'extase*" (1905–08). At the same time as he in the piano sonates, from the fifth and onwards, developed harmony towards central sounds, he took the same step here in the orchestra music.

As in many cases, there was a programme in the background: the created spirit conquers the opposition and delivers the world into ecstasy. But what's impressive with the theosophical lines of thought is that the bad and cliché filled prose goes through a transformation here into magnificent musical energy. One can understand a scheme which falls back on the sonata form, although with double repeats and an extensive coda. At the same time it audibly gives rein to the musical flow and energies, Skrjabin's distinctive contribution to the orchestra repertoire. ■

Alan Gilbert, conductor

The American Alan Gilbert is one of his generation's most sought-after conductors. He has been the Royal Stockholm Philharmonic Orchestra's chief conductor and artistic advisor since 2000. The season 2007-08 is Alan's last season as chief conductor and artistic advisor for the Royal Stockholm Philharmonic Orchestra. After eight fantastic seasons during which the Royal Stockholm Philharmonic Orchestra has seen tremendous development, he now bids us farewell with a carefully selected dream season. Under Gilbert's leadership the orchestra has strengthened its position both at home and internationally – with recent performances in London, Tokyo and New York, to name but a few.

Gilbert is in the elite of conductors and he regularly works with the world's leading orchestras. Besides being chief conductor of the Royal Stockholm Philharmonic Orchestra, Gilbert is also principal guest conductor for the NDR Symphony Orchestra in Hamburg. He has also made his name as opera conductor, as music director at the Sante Fe opera in New Mexico where he led a succession of productions during the summers. During the coming

season he will be making his debut at the Vienna State Opera (Carmen).

Last summer it was announced that Alan Gilbert was to be made Music Director for the New York Philharmonic Orchestra. This appointment brought an end to many years' speculation over who would take over this prestigious position after Lorin Maazel. Alan Gilbert had often been mentioned as a possible name since he has had close relationships with the orchestra for many years. Alan Gilbert's contract with the New York Philharmonic Orchestra is for five years commencing from the season 2009-10, and including twelve concert weeks per season. Alan Gilbert began his final season with the Royal Stockholm Philharmonic Orchestra with a gala concert in the presence of the King and Queen of Sweden on 13 September. He will be closing out his tenure with Mahler's ninth symphony on 7 June 2008.

Alan Gilbert will be succeeded at the Royal Swedish Philharmonic Orchestra by the Finnish conductor Sakari Oramo. ■

The Royal Stockholm Philharmonic Orchestra

The Royal Stockholm Philharmonic Orchestra was formed in 1902 and since 1926 it has had its home in the concert hall in the centre of Stockholm. The orchestra actively works on renewing and broadening traditional symphony repertoires throughout the world by, for example, much appreciated and talked about festivals, regular first performances of newly-written music and ground-breaking projects such as the video game music concerts Play! Held in both 2006 and 2007.

The Royal Stockholm Philharmonic Orchestra has 105 of Sweden's most talented musicians; many of the members perform as soloists, both with their own orchestras and with other orchestras both in Sweden and abroad.

The American Alan Gilbert took over as the orchestra's chief conductor and artistic director in

2000. He has a contract until the end of the season 2007/08 and will be succeeded by the Finnish Sakari Oramo. Among the orchestra's previous chief conductors are the legendary Fritz Busch, Antal Dorati, Genady Rozhdestvensky, Yuri Ahronovitch and Paavo Berglund.

With its tours the orchestra has strengthened its position in the international arena, in more recent years with performances in London, Tokyo and New York to name a few. During spring 2007 there was a Balkan tour where the Royal Stockholm Philharmonic Orchestra performed together with Håkan Hardenberger and the percussion ensemble Kroumata.

The orchestra participates at functions in connection with the Nobel Prize Awards and the Polar Music Prize Awards. ■